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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [NL](#)  
SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/SCENESETTER: FOREIGN MINISTER BOT'S  
10/23 WASHINGTON VISIT

Classified By: Ambassador Roland Arnall, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

MADAM SECRETARY:

11. (C) Dutch Foreign Minister Bernard Bot's upcoming visit to Washington DC comes just one month before national elections. It therefore provides an excellent opportunity to move some difficult issues forward in a way that helps ensure that the next Dutch government, whatever its configuration, comes into office on a positive note with regard to the bilateral relationship. Although we have had, and will continue to have, differences with the Dutch on a variety of issues, they remain one of our staunchest allies in continental Europe, willing to put their credibility, resources, and even troops on the line again and again to support transatlantic objectives. Bot's support was critical in the Dutch decisions to deploy troops to Afghanistan, to participate in UNIFIL, and to provide significant assistance to Darfur. He has also been an outspoken advocate of tougher measures to restrain North Korean and Iranian nuclear ambitions, and is a strong supporter of our goals for the 2006 NATO summit.

12. (C) The current government's close ties to the U.S. have not been without cost to the coalition government or to Bot personally. Parliamentary and public concerns about Guantanamo/Detainee issues, in particular, have put Bot in the uncomfortable position of having to defend the bilateral relationship in Parliament while carrying out explicit parliamentary instructions to criticize U.S. policies at every opportunity. John Bellinger's successful visit here October 10-11 helped shift our bilateral discussions in a more positive direction, and Bot has expressed strong interest in continuing the dialogue; we need to move quickly to exploit this opening to support our broader efforts to influence Dutch and European opinion.

13. (C) In addition to his meeting with you, Bot has meetings with Sen. Chuck Hagel, Deputy NSA Crouch, and Deputy Secretary of Defense England on Oct. 23. He will also give a

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press conference and attend a dinner hosted by the American Enterprise Institute on transatlantic relations. On Oct. 24, Bot will meet with Deputy NSA Elliott Abrams, deliver a speech at Georgetown University on Saving Democracy in a World of Change, and attend a lunch at the Dutch ambassador's residence on Afghanistan. While Afghanistan, Guantanamo/Detainee issues, and the upcoming Riga summit will be the main items on his agenda, Bot will also be interested in hearing about your recent visit to the Middle East. This

cable contains brief summaries of the current state of play of these and several other issues -- North Korea/Iran, Venezuela, Sudan, the Human Rights Council, Joint Strike Fighter, and Law Enforcement cooperation -- as viewed from The Hague.

#### Overview

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14. (C) Bot's visit to Washington comes against the backdrop of the November 22 national elections, in which Bot's governing Christian Democratic Alliance (CDA) has recently pulled from behind to run neck-in-neck with the opposition Labor Party (PvdA). Regardless of which party gains the most seats in the next parliament, the next Dutch government -- like all previous Dutch governments -- will be a coalition, probably containing at least one of the current government's two center-right parties (CDA and VVD), either governing together or individually in partnership with the PvdA. For that reason alone, it is clear that many of the current government's policies will continue. In the heat of a hotly contested campaign, however, opposition candidates will continue to exploit perceived weaknesses in the Bot/Balkenende foreign policy for political gain, and Bot will feel compelled to respond -- sometimes in ways that appear unnecessarily critical of the U.S. While we enjoy excellent working relations with the Dutch on a wide range of issues around the world -- including, most obviously, in Afghanistan -- we should not underestimate the level of public frustration with U.S. policies or the current government's hyper-sensitivity to criticism from a volatile and divided electorate.

15. (C) Bot could retain the Foreign Minister portfolio in any future coalition government in which CDA is a partner. Although Bot wants the job, however, he faces stiff competition, including from within his own party, as Maxim

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Verhagen, the CDA's leader in parliament, is also a prime contender. Bot is actively using visits such as this one to demonstrate his value to his party and the general electorate. By choosing not to stand for parliament personally, he may also hope to remain somewhat above politics in order to make himself more attractive to potential coalition partners. Even if it turns out to be a last hurrah, a successful visit to the U.S. at this moment is important to Bot personally, to the Balkenende government, and for the bilateral relationship in general.

#### Afghanistan

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16. (C) Despite a contentious parliamentary debate last winter and low public support, the Dutch deployment to Uruzgan as part of NATO's ISAF III mission has not emerged as a difficult election issue for the current government -- at least not yet. In retrospect, the lengthy debate, in which the PvdA ultimately voted in favor of the deployment despite serious reservations, effectively neutralized most serious critics of the mission early and locked all the major parties into supportive positions. In an effort to destroy this consensus, opposition parties to the left of Labor, notably GreenLeft and the Socialist Party, have argued noisily that the GONL has failed in its promise to maintain a clear line between ISAF and OEF operations, and that the focus of the mission has shifted from reconstruction -- which the public largely supports -- to a far more controversial combat mission. So far, however, PvdA politicians have not taken the bait, and the GONL has effectively countered these charges by stressing that a secure environment is necessary for any effective reconstruction effort, and that Dutch military forces are fully prepared to deal with the challenges they face.

17. (C) Meanwhile, the Dutch have performed well in the field,

engaging and killing the enemy. That said, the Dutch continue to place a higher emphasis on hearts and minds reconstruction efforts than on the hunt for terrorists -- combat missions have been largely reactive instead of proactive. They are set to take over regional command in the south in November. The Dutch have not suffered any casualties as a result of enemy fire -- an F-16 crash and apparent suicide are the only casualties thus far. Some speculate a high casualty count might put Afghanistan back in play for the elections. FM Bot should be congratulated and encouraged for the Dutch deployment and performance in Uruzgan as they continue to punch above their weight. Bot most likely will raise increased security along the Pakistani border.

#### Detainees/Guantanamo

18. (C) This is perhaps the most difficult issue in our bilateral relationship right now. All major parties, including the CDA, condemned the recent revelations of secret prisons and continue to demand that Guantanamo Bay be closed -- without offering credible alternatives. Bot has been at the center of this particular storm, repeatedly called to testify before Parliament to defend the bilateral relationship in the face of the widely-shared perception that the U.S. is not abiding by international law -- an especially sensitive issue for the Dutch, who are proud of The Hague's traditional role as the preeminent center of international law -- and ignoring the concerns of allies. Bot has received explicit instructions from Parliament to raise detainee issues bilaterally and in international fora including the EU GAERC and NATO NAC; he has done so with a vigor bordering on obsession. That said, a recent visit to The Hague by John Bellinger and other senior officials appears to have made modest inroads into Bot's thinking. and he now supports continuing a serious dialogue to find legally viable, long term solutions to the detainee issue, including revisiting portions of the Geneva Conventions. Since Bot expects to speak publicly about the issue during his visit, it would be useful to re-emphasize in your meeting with him that the Military Commissions Act provides every detainee in Guantanamo some means of judicial review and that the secret prisons remain subject to Congressional oversight and U.S. law.

#### NATO/Riga Summit

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19. (C) The GONL for the most part agrees with our Riga Summit goals, including especially the need to demonstrate progress in Afghanistan. The Dutch have been supporters of our global partnership initiative, although they have previously expressed concern that building stronger ties with security providers might create first- and second-class partnerships at the expense of security consumers. The Dutch strongly support a single tool box from which all interested parties might seek to enhance ties with NATO. They are conscious of other Allied concerns -- notably France -- regarding the use of global terminology. They advise at Riga an understated and fact-oriented approach to NATO's role as a global player to garner French support for initiative.

10. (C) The Dutch also are with us when it comes to the nuts and bolts for Riga -- it's the whither NATO question that causes consternation. They support various military capability enhancement initiatives, including the C-17 consortium, the special operations center, and the Middle East training center, and eventually supported Intensified Dialogue (ID) for Georgia. That said, the Dutch are concerned about the direction of NATO and remain leery of enlargement plans. While the MFA working level has been supportive of Croatia's membership aspirations, Bot and Political Director Pieter de Gooijer believe the EU and NATO

are expanding too quickly. They have called for an Allied existential discussion to determine NATO's path, both at Riga and at subsequent summits in 2008 and 2009. Following the President's recent announcement, Bot's visit provides an excellent opportunity to make a pitch for Croatian NATO membership at the 2008 summit.

#### Lebanon/Middle East Peace Process

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¶11. (C) The Dutch are contributing a 150-person frigate as part of the maritime component of UNIFIL. But MFA Head of Middle Eastern Affairs Henriette van Lynden-Leijten told Ambassador Arnall October 17 the Dutch are taking a step-by-step approach to the Middle East, especially regarding Syria and Lebanon, to determine where the Dutch might have value added. This involves a review of possible options, including better cooperation with the Middle East Quartet, more meetings with moderate Arab states, and better definitions of end goals. She added, however, that Dutch influence over Syria has been clouded by a contentious custody case involving two Dutch-Syrian children currently encamped at the Dutch embassy in Damascus. Otherwise, van Lynden-Leijten said Bot has excellent relations in the Middle East, and will no doubt ask for a readout on the Secretary's recent trip to the region. Bot should be encouraged to take a greater role, especially with regard to influencing the EU.

#### North Korea/Iran

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¶12. (C) The GONL -- and Bot in particular -- share our deep concern over nuclear developments in North Korea and Iran. Bot publicly labeled North Korea's nuclear test irresponsibly provocative and totally senseless, and called for Pyongyang to return to the six-party talks. He also said the use of force would be counterproductive, given the large population in nearby Seoul, and suggested China was crucial in getting North Korea to return to the table. While the Dutch continue to push for a diplomatic resolution, they worry about the message the international community is sending to Iran and its nuclear program. Although publicly supportive of the EU-3's efforts to engage Iran, in private he has frequently expressed frustration at being left out of the process. Recently, he called publicly for the UN Security Council to become directly involved given the apparent lack of progress on the EU track. The Dutch have offered on several occasions to play a more active role on the margins of the six-party talks and in dealing with Iran, suggesting that any and all diplomatic pressure would be helpful in persuading these states to abandon their current courses. Bot should be encouraged to continue to press EU members to engage on North Korea and Iran.

#### Venezuela and Latin America

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¶13. (C) As Venezuela's neighbor -- the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba sit just off the Venezuelan coast -- the Dutch are

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understandably worried about Chavez' intentions, but also go to great lengths to avoid provoking him. For example, the Dutch were unwilling to lobby on behalf of Guatemala for the UN Security Council or otherwise draw attention to their intention to vote against Venezuela. They have significant interests in Venezuela, including a new Shell exploration concession and a major subcontract on new light frigates. While the Dutch posture toward Venezuela is less forward leaning than we would like - and while Bot has at times made statements we consider unhelpful - the Dutch have been leaders within the EU on other regional issues. Dutch participation in Colombian paramilitary reintegration, coca eradication efforts, Nicaraguan election monitoring, and other regional initiatives has been superb. On Cuba and other Latin American issues, they have been a useful

counterbalance to traditional Spanish sway within the EU.

#### Joint Strike Fighter (JSF)

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¶14. (C) The Dutch Parliament is expected on October 24 to approve the GONL's signing of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Production, Sustainment, and Follow-on Development (PSFD) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). A solid majority in Parliament supports the GONL's continued participation in JSF, while the Dutch press views MOU signature as a foregone conclusion. The MOU signing ceremony hosted by Deputy Secretary of Defense England is planned for November 14 in

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the Pentagon. Dutch State Secretary of Defense van der Knaap and Foreign Trade Minister van Gennip are expected to represent the GONL. The Dutch and Italian governments are considering a joint signing ceremony, although this has not yet been confirmed.

#### Sudan

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¶15. (C) Dutch financial contributions to Sudan relief, development and peacekeeping, exceed all but our own, on a per capita basis. We have worked extremely closely with the MFA and Development Minister Ardenne (Bot's close colleague) on Darfur and southern Sudan. The Dutch have been close allies on several other regional initiatives, including efforts to deal with the Lords' Resistance Army in Uganda, promote reconciliation and intelligence cooperation in the Great Lakes, train peacekeepers, and develop effective HIV/AIDS programs. Van Ardenne, rather than Bot, takes the lead on these issues.

#### Human Rights Council

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¶16. (C) Bot would like the U.S. to run for the HRC in 2007. The Dutch worked very closely with our mission in Geneva this fall and were among our closest EU allies during the Israel/Lebanon debates - this despite severe criticism at home, both of Bot and Israel. He is committed to HRC reform, and frustrated by the course of events so far, but believes like-minded nations can best protect their interests and effect change by remaining involved.

#### Law Enforcement Issues

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¶17. (SBU) Attorney General Gonzales will visit The Hague a few days after your meeting with Bot. Gonzales will open a bilateral conference on cyber crime that the Embassy is co-sponsoring with the Dutch Justice Ministry. The conference will spur our bilateral cooperation on high-tech crime, which is emerging as a priority for the law enforcement communities in both countries. Law enforcement cooperation is good and getting better. While bureaucratic and privacy restrictions continue to hamper some direct police-to-police cooperation, we have made significant advances in the last two years. In particular, Dutch efforts to stem the flow of ecstasy to the United States have resulted in dramatic declines in the volume of Dutch-linked ecstasy seized in the U.S. since 2000. Cooperation with DEA on narcotics, and the FBI on cyber crime and counter-terrorism investigations, is excellent.

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